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In Shakespeare criticism, as in most things Anglo-Saxon but sport, there has been little professionalism. The best as well as the worst of our scientists and artists have done their work without learning how to do it, and our critics, like our soldiers, have won their Waterloos on cricket fields. For two hundred and fifty years Englishmen and Americans have been writing about the character of Falstaff, and hardly three or four of these have been students of the stage. Since 1777 they have followed in the steps of Maurice Morgann,¹ a country gentleman of philosophic bent and literary taste who seems to have known little of the acted drama and to have loved it less. In reading Shakespeare he is not reminded of Plautus or Terence, of Fletcher or Molière. We all know what sort of opinions, in ignorance of technique and historic development, were entertained in Morgann's time by men so delicate in sensibility as Walpole and Shelley, concerning Greek sculpture, Italian painting, and Gothic architecture; and is it likely that his opinion concerning Falstaff, though in England and America it has stood now for much more than a century, should be less fallible? Time establishes institutions, not truth. But though still we may hear that pointed construction was the immediate expression of the gloom and aspiration of the Middle Ages, and that groined vaulting and pillared aisles were devised in imitation of God's first temple, the over-arching

¹ *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, often since reprinted, and twice within the last ten years.

forest, Anglo-Saxons have had their eyes opened to the technique of art as not to the technique of the play. What might be called the external history of the drama has been explored, but technique has been neglected, and still anybody ventures to write on Shakespeare who has a style and taste. Few among these would appreciate the remark of Stevenson that to read a play is as difficult as to read musical score. And to read an old play is as difficult as to read old score.

Morgann reads like a true Romantic, and discovers in the effect of Falstaff upon us in the two Parts of *Henry IV* an opposition between feeling and the understanding. "Shakespeare has contrived to make secret impressions upon us of courage in favor of a character which was to be held up for sport and laughter on account of actions of apparent cowardice and dishonor." Falstaff's conduct is cowardly; his character, that subtler essence, is courageous.¹ Contrary to what we might expect, the cowardice and dishonor, which are perceived by the understanding, are the obvious traits, those "thrust forward and pressed upon our notice"; and the favorable mental impressions are attained to in the case of Morgann himself, not by the mystical faculty alleged, but through deliberate conjecture and devious ratiocination, that is, by the understanding, too. Whatever the process, the direct effect of the incidents of Gadshill and Shrewsbury, of Falstaff's confessions, and of the downright ridicule of him by the Prince, Lancaster, and Poins, is counteracted, he thinks, by inferences from the incidental testimony of characters such as Doll Tearsheet, Shallow, Lord Bardolph, and the Chief-Justice, and by such circumstances as his earlier "familiarity" with John of Gaunt, a "dozen captains" calling him to court, and his appearance once on the eve of battle in the presence of the King. At times the critic goes farther, and, in the faith that Shakespeare's characters are "essentially different from those of other writers," considers Falstaff as if he were an "historic rather than dramatic being,"² inquiring adventurously into his hopeful youth, his family, and his station, and inferring from these that he must have had the

¹ Cf., among many, Professor Bradley, *Oxford Lectures, The Rejection of Falstaff*, p. 266: "sometimes behaves in a cowardly way, but that does not show that he was a coward."

² Ed. 1820, pp. 61, 66.

constitutional instincts of courage although he had lost the principles which ordinarily accompany them.¹ So firmly has this notion of Falstaff as a real person taken hold of him that now and then he breaks out into exclamations against the "malice" from which Falstaff's reputation suffers, appeals to the reader's good nature to right him, and when confronted with the more unequivocal acts and utterances of his favorite can but call them "unfortunate," and, as if he were a friend in trouble, deplore his loquacity in soliloquy and "imprudence" in deed.² In this spirit of unaesthetic kindliness, and in accordance with his principle of preferring to the prominent and obvious what is latent and obscure, he discredits the testimony of Lancaster and Poins as prompted by envy and ill-will, and the Prince's as given in raillery, makes much of the compliment implied in the surrender of that "famous knight and most valorous enemy" Colville of the Dale, and is of the opinion that a man who takes captives, and jests and dallies on a battlefield, has not got so frightened as to lose his presence of mind. Love of humor is the mainspring of his character: he falls flat at Shrewsbury for a jest and none of his lies and braggadocios is intended to deceive. The escapade of Gadshill, which in the story Shakespeare puts first, Morgann considers, as the "source of much unreasonable prejudice," last, and even if it must be thought an exhibition of cowardice holds it to be a single exception. The virtue of the jest afterward at Eastcheap is in the "reproof of the lies," which are but humor, and not in the exposure of the cowardice, which is a venial and momentary aberration.

In sum and substance and often in minute detail these views have been reproduced by English critics since³—by Coleridge and Swinburne, by Hazlitt, Lloyd, and Maginn, who make a jest even of the flight from Gadshill, and most elaborately, though most subtly of

¹ There is excellent comment on this trick of Morgann's and its effect on Shakespeare criticism since, in Mr. A. B. Walkley's *Drama and Life: Professor Bradley's Hamlet*. I cannot help thinking, however, that the fallacy would have prevailed even had Morgann never perpetrated it.

² Critics have kept something of this tone of the apologist to the present day, as Professor Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, pp. 266, 268, note.

³ This is my only justification for paying so much attention to the ingenious but unpalatable arguments of a critic so far removed in time; this, and the stamp of approval laid upon them by Swinburne, Professor Bradley, and perhaps most remarkable of all, the student of roguery, Professor F. H. Chandler, in his introduction to *Henry IV* in

all, by Professor A. C. Bradley. His main achievement is the development, after Röttscher and others, of Morgann's notion of Falstaff as a "military freethinker" into that of one who by his humor dissolves away into words and airy nothings not only honor but those other obstacles and "nuisances"—truth, duty, devotion to one's country, the terrors of death and religion, everything in short that makes life real and earnest, thereby "lifting us into an atmosphere of perfect freedom."¹ Among the Germans Falstaff the philosopher has passed unchallenged, but among these students of the technique and history of the drama he has generally had to bear the badge of a coward too.

Johnson scoffed at his friend Morgann's innovation, and critics since have been disposed to pay him back in his coin. But they would hardly have been so quick to do it to Dryden, though twice explicitly and without qualification he calls Falstaff liar, coward, glutton, and buffoon.² And Thomas Fuller, Oldmixon, and all the seventeenth century with them take it for granted that he is nothing else.³ Since then the world had moved on a bit; yet a critical opinion on the drama propounded amid all the vagaries of the hey-day of Romanticism, by one neither a dramatist nor a student of the drama, is on the face of it quite as questionable as the contrary opinion which till then had stood unimpeached.

Not only is Morgann strangely confused and contradictory in that, finding the circumstances creditable to Falstaff thrown into the background, and the "follies and the buffoonery" thrown into the foreground, he calls us, who attach greater importance to the latter, the dupes of our wisdom and systematic reasoning, but thus

the Tudor edition. Even the Germans, as I suggest below, owe more to Morgann than they may be aware. Among English critics two conspicuous exceptions are Mr. Courthope (*History of English Poetry*, IV, 114) and Mr. E. K. Chambers (*Red Letter Shakespeare*, introduction to *Henry IV*, Part II); but they give no reasons and permit themselves no more than an oracular sentence.

¹ *Oxford Lectures*, pp. 262-63.

² *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (Every Man's Library), p. 43: "old, fat, merry, cowardly, drunken, amorous, vain, and lying"; Ingleby's *Shakespeare Allusion-Book* (ed. Munro), II, 246: "a liar, a coward, a Glutton, and Buffon, because all these qualities may agree in the same man."

³ Ingleby, *op. cit.*; Fuller, I, 486, "make-sport in all plays for a coward"; II, 43, "coward," "Buffoone"; Oldmixon, II, 431; George Daniel, I, 507; cf. Captain Alexander Smith, *Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies*, etc., 1719, I, 1 f., who takes it that Shakespeare intended him for "a grand coward," and what Mr. Chandler, *Literature of Roguery*, p. 175, says about his thinking Falstaff none, has to do only with the Fastolf of history and legend.

and otherwise he betrays a total misapprehension of dramatic method, whether of his own or of an earlier time. It is all too plain that he cannot read score. To him, as to many another philosopher and literateur, Shakespeare is not score to be played, but a book to be read; and a really great dramatist is one who dupes us, deliberately misplaces the emphasis, transcendently baffles men's wits. Yet of all dramatists down to Dumas and Ibsen—and even of them—the contrary is the case. What is in the foreground is important; what is in the background is less important, and, in Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, often epically, rather than dramatically and psychologically, in keeping.¹ And what stands first in the play, as the cowardly flight from Gadshill, is most important of all and dominates the whole. Besides these simple principles of dramatic emphasis and perspective, which in our discussion will constantly be illustrated, Morgann and his followers ignore the various hints of the poet as embodied in the established conventions of the time—the confessions in soliloquy, the comments and predictions of important undiscredited characters like the Prince and Poins, and various devices and bits of “business,” like Falstaff’s roaring as he runs and his falling flat in battle. All these are as much means of expression as the Elizabethan vocabulary of the text, and yet they are treated as if they had no fixed and definite meaning—as if, as someone has said, the book had dropped from the skies; and the playwright and his time vanish from his play. So far has this gone that, as we have seen, inquiry presses coolly by him to the character’s lineage, financial and social experiences, and his past as a whole. It was but yesterday that an Elizabethan scholar contended that we had a right to do this, and that characters in plays, particularly in Shakespeare’s, were not unreal like statues and paintings. They can think, talk, and walk—they are bits of real life, not art!

On the principle that what is most prominent is most important surely there is no need to dwell: of art it is the beginning and end. Of the correlative principle that the first impression is designedly the dominant one there is in the case of Shylock a remarkable illustration which I have exhibited elsewhere,² and even in the plays of

¹ See my article “Hamlet and Iago,” *Kittredge Anniversary Papers* (Boston, 1913).

² See in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1911, my article “Shylock,” pp. 240–41.

Ibsen we have only apparent exceptions to the rule. If Helmer in the *Doll's House* is not the heroic character, and Nora not the frivolous one, they may at first appear to be, that first impression is corrected not by "secret" impressions and insignificant details such as Morgann discovers, but by subsequent revelations which loom large and for which every preparation has been made. They do not counteract and contradict; they consummate and fulfil; and the same character moves and wavers, discloses itself and shrinks together again, before our eyes. Ibsen makes us the dupes, not of our wisdom but of our stupidity, and then for no more than moments. Such plays, however, are not Shakespeare's; his involve processes which unfold primarily not character but events; and at the end, except for casual conversions, his characters are pretty much what they were at the beginning. Falstaff is as much of a coward sprawling on Shrewsbury Field as running down Gadshill. What, then, do these facts mean? as Mr. Bradley asks after having detailed the "secret impressions." "Does Shakespeare put them all in with no purpose at all, or in defiance of his own intention?" He never defies his own intention, I suppose, save in the hands of us critics. The incongruities, as I hope presently to show, are either necessarily or traditionally involved in the type of the *miles gloriosus* which he is here undertaking to exhibit; or they are incidental to the current convention of the professional comic person on the stage; or else they are such contradictions and irrelevancies as Shakespeare, writing for the stage and not for the study, slips into continually, examples of which in one play have, with admirable discernment, been collected by Mr. Bradley himself.¹

Meantime we take it that, standing first, "this unfortunate affair" of Gadshill is *meant* to prejudice us. In itself it is an example of the old device of a practical joke on the stage, not disdained by Molière and Goldoni, Goldsmith and Sheridan, any more than by the Elizabethans, and in farce not extinct today. According to Elizabethan usage a foolish character—a braggart, or a coward, or a conceited ass like Malvolio, or even a merry misogynist like Benedick

¹ *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 265-68. The contradictions involved in Shakespeare's time-references, again, are without number; since the days of Wilson they have been turned into a miracle of art.

—is, by conspiracy, fooled to the top of his bent, and in the end made aware of it and jeered at. Of this there are many instances in the comedies of Shakespeare, as in those of Marston, Chapman, Dekker, and the rest of the craft. Always the expectations of the practical jokers—as here in Falstaff's cowardly conduct and "incomprehensible lies"—are fulfilled, and the victim's ridiculous sayings and doings cast in his teeth. Sometimes he loses temper, like Malvolio and Benedick; sometimes he takes to his wits to cover his retreat, like Falstaff. But at the outset he steps into the trap laid for him, unawares. There is no instance of a character making a fool of himself on purpose—playing the coward on purpose¹ and then playing the ludicrous braggart afterward. To an audience such an ambiguous situation would have been incomprehensible. In Part II, when the Prince and Poins overhear Falstaff slandering them, they force him this time to admit that he did not know them as well as the Lord that made them. In neither incident could he have played a part any more than Parolles when he slanders and, as he thinks, betrays his master and all the leaders of his army;² in either case we have a convention, a bit of stage language, we might say, almost as precise and ascertainable in meaning as any old word or phrase in the text, but then current in the same acceptation on the Continent and in after times as well. The overhearing and confronting of the backbiter or plain-speaker is a device employed in *Le monde où l'on s'ennuie*³ as in the *Fourberies de Scapin*.

There are indeed some few instances of the victim, not a fool as thought, detecting the trap; but he gets even, like the Merry Wives of Windsor, not by stepping into it with a still smile, but by leading

¹ Unlike many, Morgann and Mr. Bradley do not think that Falstaff runs away on purpose, though they do think that his lying afterward is in jest. Others think that he takes the hint and turns earnest to jest in the midst of his buckram story:

Prince: Prithee let him alone: we shall have more anon.

Fal.: Dost thou hear me, Hal?

Prince: Ay, and mark thee too, Jack.

Fal.: Do so, for it is worth listening to.

The first speech is certainly an aside—by the second that is clearly indicated. If at the last speech Falstaff sees that he is detected, still he does not save his reputation or cleverness, about which the critics are concerned, for he has been tripped up repeatedly already; and the cardinal stupidity lies in the tale as a whole.

² *All's Well*, IV, i.

³ III, i. Darkness here takes the place of disguise, as mistaken identity does in the *Fourberies* where Zerbinette has her say about G ronte to his face.

the joker into it or setting one of his own. In that case the victim makes his detection of the trap quite clear to the audience in aside or soliloquy. Whenever in Elizabethan drama a character is feigning we are informed of it. That Prince Hal is playing the roysterer on purpose he himself tells us twice over,¹ but that Falstaff is playing coward, liar, or thief on purpose is intimated neither by him nor by anyone else.

That thus we read Shakespeare, not by his own light only, but also by that of his contemporaries, appears from the parallel situation in the second and third acts of the First Part of Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West*.² Attacked in the fields by Bess in the disguise of a man, the boasting and swaggering Roughman shows the white feather, but afterward boasts to her of his deeds, is led on by her simulated interest and sympathy, entangled and tripped up in his lies, and finally put to confusion when all the facts are laid bare. Like Falstaff he incurs ridicule, if not for counting noses and telling buckram from Kendal green when it is so dark that he cannot see his own hand, at least for justling with the enemy for the wall in mid-field. Like Falstaff he tells how and when he "took" the blows and "put them by." "I was never so put to it" (I never dealt better). "I think I paid him home" (seven of the eleven I paid). "Scap'd he with life?" (pray God, you have not murder'd some of them). "Ay, that's my fear: if he recover this," etc. (nay, that's past praying for). That Roughman is a coward no one can doubt, "for he himself has said it";³ and manifestly the whole point in the "reproof of his lies," as of Falstaff's, is the ignominy of cowardice. The two things are inseparable; no dramatist—no one but a metaphysician—would think of separating them, or of having a liar confuted who is lying for fun.

Falstaff's cowardice appears still more clearly when the Gadshill incident is viewed in detail. There is the testimony of the Prince, Poins, and Falstaff himself. Four times the Prince flatly calls him coward to his face.⁴ The only time Falstaff attempts to deny it—on Gadshill—the Prince replies, "Well, we leave that to the proof";

¹ Part I, I, ii, 160, 218-40.

² Published in 1631; probably written before 1603.

³ *Fair Maid*, Part I, III, i, 296 (*Works*, 1874).

⁴ Part I, II, ii, 69; iv, 268, 542; Part II, II, iv, 353.

and it comes speedily. Poin's estimate of his character has been subjected to the most undramatic and hair-splitting comment imaginable:¹ "Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back; and for the third, if he fight longer than he sees reason, I'll forswear arms" (I, ii, 205). Certainly the latter half of the sentence contains no praise, however faint; it is followed by the remark about "the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us." Here or anywhere Poin, or Shakespeare himself, is not the man to distinguish between conduct and character, principles and constitution, a coward and a courageously consistent Epicurean; and this can only be a case of understatement and irony. Falstaff himself admits that he was a coward on instinct,² and at Shrewsbury says to himself, "I fear the shot here," "I am afraid of this Percy," and makes his words good by stabbing the corpse. Against such an interpretation Morgann and his followers murmur, bidding us remember his age and his peculiar philosophy, the corrupting example of his associates, the odds against him, and the suddenness of the assault; but on the Elizabethan comic stage, or any popular stage, where of course there are no relentings toward cowardice (there being none even toward things beyond control, as cuckoldom, poverty, physical ugliness, or meanness of birth), nobody confesses to fear but a coward, a child, or a woman. All of Shakespeare's cowards, like his villains, bear their names written in their foreheads, and his true men, like Don Quixote in the eyes of Sancho, neither know nor understand what fear or dismay is.

How little Morgann regarded dramatic method and stage-craft is nowhere more evident than at this early moment in the episode:

Peto: How many be there of them?

Gadshill: Some eight or ten.

Fal.: Zounds, will they not rob us?

Prince: What, a coward, Sir John Paunch?

Fal.: Indeed, I am not John of Gaunt, etc.—II, ii.

This he finds to be hardly more of a confession³ than the Prince's own remark to Poin as they plan their trick in the second scene of Act I: "Yea, but I doubt they will be too hard for us." The latter

¹ By Morgann first, and, without the hair-splitting, by many after him, including Swinburne and Bradley.

² Part I, II, iv, 300-301.

³ P. 126.

remark is casual, being meant only to call forth Poins's comment (quoted above) on their companions' timorous natures, whereas Falstaff's speech is uttered after the limelight has been turned full upon him—the audience has been apprised of his cowardice, the business is afoot, and the booty at hand. Thus everything has been nicely calculated to give his abrupt exclamation full comic value and “bring down the house,” as anybody would see but one who on principle had already blurred dramatic perspective and jumbled “values.”

That Falstaff is not dissembling is still more evident from the management of the ensuing scene. Immediately after the robbery of the travelers he calls Poins and the Prince cowards, and swaggers. Now the coward charging the brave with cowardice,¹ like the coward boasting of his courage,² is a perennial situation, on the stage or off it. Parolles, Panurge, the two Jodelets of Scarron, and the cowards of the “character”-writers are examples; and in our time an audience knows as well what it means when such a charge comes from the lips of one already discredited as when a drunken man declares that he is not drunk. To clinch the business, immediately upon his words follows the ironical dramatic reversal and traditional comic situation of the robbery of the robbers,³ and the fat rogue roaring and running away. What dunce in the audience could now fail to follow the drift? And when Falstaff, with his craven crew, bursts in, sweating to death, upon Hal and Poins at the inn, he still cries out on cowards, again and again, as he drinks. Then, when he has caught his breath, come the “incomprehensible lies” of the men in buckram and Kendal green, the acting out of the combat—wards, blows, and extremities—and the swindling exhibit of battered buckler, bloodied garments, and hacked sword. And just like the coward denying his cowardice and the drunken man denying his drunkenness, he now cries, “I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse!” “Wilt thou believe me, Hal?” he says on a like

¹ Basilisco, *Soliman and Perseda* (1588), II, ii, 67–80; III, ii, 30; Parolles, *All's Well*, IV, iii, 321; *Jodelet, Maitre-Valet*, I, iii and v; *Jodelet Duelliste*; Panurge, Rabelais, IV, chap. 24. John Earle, *Microcosmography* (1628), The Coward: “A coward is the man that is commonly most fierce against the coward.”

² All cowards in the drama boast. Cf., besides those cited above, the popular types, Capitano, Harlequin, Scaramouche. Cf. Maurice Sand, *Masques et Bouffons*, II, 258.

³ Eckhardt, *Die lustige Person*, pp. 151–52.

occasion, again much misdoubting in his bluster; "three or four bonds apiece and a seal ring of my grandfather's." We have seen him fighting, we know his "old ward" and how he "bore his point," and at these we laugh as at the "eight-penny matter" of the bonds and ring. Even if we should suspect him of saying it all for fun, on the spur of the moment, we now learn from blushing Bardolph of "his monstrous devices"—that like the cowardly Dericke of the *Famous Victories of Henry V*¹ he had persuaded them all to tickle their noses with speargrass, and to hack their swords with their daggers. As the precious coward Parolles, who thinks also of cutting his garments and breaking his Spanish sword, plans to do, he had given himself some hurts, though "slight" ones, and now swears he had "got them in exploit."² Here are all the conventional and traditional tricks of cowardice,³ and on the exposure of cowardice the comic effect of the scene depends as much as on the reproof of the lies.

Ah! je le veux charger ce maistre fanfaron:

On ne peut l'estre tant, et n'estre pas poltron.

Just there is the point of twitting him with his boasting lies and excuses; but twice in the scene the Prince calls him coward into the bargain, and casts it up to him that he "hacked his sword and then said it was in fight."⁴ "What a slave art thou!" Hal says truly.

Nor by his shifts and evasions, "I knew ye" and "instinct," does he come off safe and sound. Throughout the rest of the scene and even in Part II he is twitted with them.⁵ "No more of that, Hal," he cries, "an thou lovest me"; and that is not the tone of triumph. Even in the midst of this scene his cowardice breaks out spontaneously anew. "Zounds," cries Poin, "an ye call me coward, I'll stab thee." And the fat man sidles off, comically enough

¹ 1585-88. As is well known, Shakespeare was acquainted with the play, and drew from it the traits of Falstaff's cowardice, thievishness, and loose living, the touches of repentance and sanctimoniousness, and his friendship with Hal.

² See *All's Well*, IV, i, for all these details; cf. Pistol, *Henry V*, V, i, 93-94:

And patches will I get unto these cudgell'd scars,
And swear I got them in the Gallia wars.

³ Aside from the other instances cited, there is that in Theophrastus, *Characters*, cap. XXV, iii, where the coward "smears himself with another's blood to show," etc.

⁴ II, iv, 288: "Coward": lines 268, 542.

⁵ II, iv, 332-35.

giving the words just on his lips the lie: "I call thee coward! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward,"¹ etc. Just so he falters and his bluster rings loud but hollow when in Part II the Servant of the Chief-Justice begs leave to tell him that he lies in his throat. "I give thee leave to tell me so! If thou gettest any leave of me, hang me!"²

Through the rest of the play his cowardice is, as Morgann drolly confesses, still "thrust forward and pressed upon our notice."³ Shakespeare will have him a coward if Morgann won't. When he hears the news of the uprising he ingenuously asks the Prince whether he is not horribly afeard, and in reply is told that the Prince lacks some of his instinct. When ordered off to the North he wishes this tavern were his drum; and on the eve of the fray he whimpers, "I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well,"⁴ and then says his catechism of dishonor. Standing by as Hal and Hotspur come together, he proves to be as good at encouraging others to fight as the white-livered Moron and Panurge.⁵ Then he falls flat and feigns death like clowns and cowards in the hour of danger, not in England only but in contemporary Germany, Spain, and Italy,⁶ and above all sets the seal on his cowardice by the dastardly blow and by hatching the scheme to take the honor of killing Hotspur to himself. "I'll swear I killed him," he says, "nothing confutes me but eyes and nobody sees me"; and could anything more effectively contradict the opinion that he "stood on the ground

¹ II, iv, 160.

² Part II, I, ii, 99; cf. II, iv, 344.

³ Pp. 3, 47.

⁴ "This articulated wish is not the fearful outcry of a coward, but the frank and honest breathing of a generous fellow, who does not expect to be seriously reproached with the character" (Morgann, p. 83). Even in our day, on the stage or off it, a character of Falstaff's reputation would not risk the confession with impunity. How much less in more rough-and-ready times!

⁵ *Princesse d'Elide*, I, iiii, where, perched in a tree, Moron urges on the archers to kill the bear; and Rabelais, II, chap. 29, where Panurge cheers on his master.

⁶ *Loerine* (1586), II, vi, Strumbo; Beolco (Ruzzante), First Dialogue; see Creizenach, IV, 340, for both; Cicognini, *Convitato di Pietra* (published before 1650), sc. 7, where Passarino falls flat to save himself, though not by feigning death; Calderon, *Principe Constante*, I, xiv, Brito, the gracioso; and for this "business" in contemporary Germany cf. Creizenach, *Englische Comödianten*, p. cv. In *Have with You to Saffron Walden* (1596), moreover, Nash, referring to an epigram of Campion's on Barnabe Barnes, and much exaggerating the tenor of the text, remarks: "He shewes how hee bragd when he was in France he slue ten men, when (fearfull cowbaby [coward]) he never heard peice shot off but he fell flat on his face." And in the character of the "coward" Nicholas Breton (*The Goode and the Badde*, 1616) says that he "falls flat on his face when he hears the cannon."

of natural courage only and common sense, and renounced that grinning idol of military zealots, honor,"¹ than his undertaking, like the pitiful poltroons, Pistol, Parolles, and Bessus,² to filch "bright honor," which the man fallen at his feet had boldly plucked? Such wreaking of one's self on a dead body, moreover, is, like his "playing possum," one of the established *lazzi* of the coward on the stage. Moron beats the bear once it is dead; the Franc Archier de Baignollet (c. 1480) beats the scarecrow once he recognizes it as such, and in Shakespeare's time clowns played pranks on corpses both in England and in Germany.³ Here in the battle, then, is a little heap of situations, *lazzi*, or bits of business, all stamped as those of a coward, not only intrinsically, but by immemorial custom; and it is difficult to see how Shakespeare could have effaced that impression even had he tried.

In the Second Part the "satyr, lecher, and parasite" in Falstaff are uppermost, and the captain rests on his laurels. But we all know how they were won, and cannot take to heart his reputation for valor with certain ladies of Eastcheap, Justice Shallow, or even the enemy at Shrewsbury and at Gaultree Forest. The effect of Dame Quickly's and Doll Tearsheet's praise of his prowess in stabbing and foining would be inconsiderable even if, with most of the English critics, including Professor Bradley himself,⁴ we failed to detect the palpable double entendre.⁵ And what a witness is

¹ Morgann, p. 103.

² Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King*. He declares to the audience that he will swear that the knife in his hand is all that is left of the sword which he had vowed to make his enemy eat. For Pistol and Parolles see above, p. 75.

³ *Princesse d'Elide*, Interm.; Recuell Picot et Nyrop, line 355. Their motives, of course, are different, for Falstaff's is his fear that Hotspur may come to life and his craving for the honor and profit of killing him; cf. Creizenach, *Englische Comödianten*, p. cv; *Romeo and Juliet*, III, i, 145 (Creizenach). In *Soliman and Perseda* Piston robs a corpse (II, i).

⁴ *Oxford Lectures*, p. 266.

⁵ Part II, II, i, 15; II, iv, 252. For the former cf. Schmidt's *Lexicon* under *stab*, and *Julius Caesar*, I, ii, 277. As for the second reference, *foin* must be used with the meaning evident in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Loyal Subject*, I, iv; *Thierry and Theodoret*, II, iii. So Part II, II, i, 21-22, *thrust*; cf. the frequent instances of *double entendre* in the words *pike*, *lance*, *target*, etc. Their equivalents are to be found contemporaneously in foreign languages, as Italian; for such jokes are international. And the obscene joke so certain in *stab*, *foin*, and *thrust*, which immediately precede and follow Quickly's remark that "a' cares not what mischief he does if his weapon be out" (l. 16), casts grave suspicion even on its simplicity and honesty of purpose, though not in Mr. Bradley's eyes (*ibid.*).

Shallow, whose "every third word is a lie," whose every word is ludicrous! Well might Falstaff break Skogan's head ("some boisterous fencer," thinks Morgann, but really Court Fool) on that day in the calendar when Shallow himself fought Sampson Stockfish, fruiterer!¹ That was a day that ended "without the perdition of souls." And a ballad, as Falstaff says, not sober history, is the place for his capture of Colville and drubbing of Pistol. The Ancient ran from him like quicksilver; and Colville surrendered "more of his courtesy," says Lancaster, "than your deserving." Our knight's reputation for valor had been as lightly won as that of Bessus, though he has not Bessus' reason to lament it.² Obviously Lancaster and the audience know more about that and his character, too, than Colville, and if Shakespeare had had any notion of redeeming him in our eyes, he would not have had his "pure and immaculate valor" snubbed by his chief.

The famous soliloquy which follows, on sack as the cause of all wit and valor, is the epilogue to the old reveller's military career and an epitome of his character. It is an old saw and familiar fact that wine makes cowards brave,³ and Falstaff speaks out (though behind his hand) when he says that men are but fools and cowards without it.

After this running comment on the two Parts of *Henry IV* we might, if it were necessary, further strengthen the case against Falstaff's courage by considering how Shakespeare's character continues and develops⁴ the dramatic and legendary tradition concerning Sir John Fastolf, or Falstaff,⁵ and Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. As is well known our knight bore the name Oldcastle in the original draft of Part I, like the cowardly, thievish loose-liver

¹ For the coward fighting a coward, see below, p. 83. Stockfish was "haddocke or hake beaten with clubbes or stockes," and a fruiterer was at least as tame as a tailor.

² *A King and No King*, III, ii. Like Falstaff's it is not of his earning, and it embarrasses him with challenges. Falstaff indeed complains of his name being terrible to the enemy, but there he is frankly joking.

³ Somerville, *The Wife*, l. 27. It is a notion found in popular lore, as in the story of the mouse which, after drinking spilt brandy, cries, "Now bring on that cat!" On the stage, Lady Macbeth confesses that she has drunk wine to stiffen her nerves; and the heroine in *La Tosca* actually drinks it.

⁴ For this see W. Baeske, *Oldcastle-Falstaff bis Shakespeare*.

⁵ In plays at least the name is spelled both ways. See J. Gairdner, *Studies in English History*, pp. 64-65.

in the *Famous Victories*. These traits as well as the rags and tatters of piety which both have about them are taken from the Lollard as traduced in monkish chronicle and popular song. And when, at the complaint of the contemporary Lord Cobham, Shakespeare was moved to make amends to the martyr in the epilogue to Part II, and change the name to Falstaff in the text, he dropped one coward of popular and dramatic tradition only to take up another. In the *First Part of Henry VI*, Act III, scene ii, Sir John Fastolf, who in fact lost a battle in France, runs ignominiously away to "save himself." In real life both Sir Johns were brave and worthy fellows;¹ they are thus overwhelmed with obloquy because in the popular imagination one charge, as this of heresy² or that of cowardice, brings every other in its trail;³ but all that concerns us here is that in Shakespeare they are cowards because they were that before. Our poet always stands by public opinion, and his English kings or Roman heroes are to him what they were to his age. Even to the dramatist of our day, as Mr. Archer observes, "a hero must be (more or less) a hero, a villain (more or less) a villain, if accepted tradition so decrees it Fawkes must not be made an earnest Presbyterian, Nell Gwynn a model of chastity, or William the Silent a chatterbox." *Sit Medea ferox invictaque, flebilis Ino*.

I have suggested that many of the "secret impressions of courage" are contradictions inherent in the type of the braggart captain. For to this type Falstaff unquestionably belongs. He has the increasing belly and decreasing leg,⁴ the diminutive page for a foil, the weapon (his pistol) that is no weapon, but a fraud,⁵ as well as

¹ For Falstaff previous to Shakespeare see Gairdner, the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oldcastle and Fastolf), and Baeske.

² As has been remarked, I think, by others, the Lollard Oldcastle as buffoon is a parallel to the "Christian" as a stock comic figure in the late Greek mimus.

³ See below, p. 80.

⁴ Part II, I, ii, 204.

⁵ Aristophanes' Kleonymus is of enormous size; Pyrgopolinices has long spindling legs, and most of the braggart soldiers have these, or a big paunch, or, like the Maccus of the atellans and sometimes Polichinelle, both the one and the other. Like the two latter characters and the English Punch, strange to say, Falstaff, in Morgann's time and perhaps earlier, was represented with a hump behind as well as before; for (p. 26) he recalls with horror the "round tortoise-back," produced by "I know not what stuffing or contrivance." Sancho Panza begins as a *miles*, for (I, chap. 9) he has a big belly, short figure, and long legs, though afterward we hear no more of them. For the weapon see below. Their courage being called in question, as is the case with the above characters and with Falstaff and Sir Tophas, it is in the spirit of ancient and Renaissance comic art, which delighted in physical contrasts, that their size of itself should almost be sufficient

most of the inner qualities of this ancient stage-figure—cowardice and outlandish bragging, gluttony and lechery, sycophancy and pride. Also he is a recruiting officer and (though in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*) a suitor gulled.¹ All these traits are manifest, except his sycophancy, which appears in his dependence on the Prince and his cajoling ways with him; and except his pride, which appears in his insistence on his title on every occasion,² and in his reputation for a proud jack among the drawers.³ Lyly's Sir Tophas, Jonson's Bobadill and Tucca, Beaumont's Bessus, Chapman's Braggadino and Quintiliano,⁴ Ralph Roister Doister, Ambidexter, and Thersites, as well as Shakespeare's Pistol, Don Armado, and Parolles, have most or many of these traits; and these descend to them, if not from the classics directly, from the Italian popular *miles*, Capitano Spavento.⁵ The English and Italian specimens differ from those of Plautus in that they are impecunious, the unwelcome parasites of tailor, barber, or landlady, not the patrons of parasites. Falstaff is both the one and the other.⁶ Unlike most braggart captains, however, he is not silly and affected—those qualities were reserved for Pistol—but is a jester and a wit. It is this circumstance no doubt that has made critics, even of late, declare that the impression of his character is quite different, and is therefore not that of a coward. But all the other traits save paunch and spindle-shanks are also the traits of famous clowns—Panurge, Sosie, Folengo's Cingar, Scarron's Jodelet—and even now a clown not a coward is a rarity on the stage. In that day of unanalytical but prodigally copious characterization, whereby on the stage, or, as in the case of Machiavelli, Luther, or Oldcastle himself, in popular tradition, a

to substantiate the charge. "When did you see a black beard with a white liver," says Heywood, "or a little fellow without a tall stomach?"

Capitano Spavento has a *paggio*; Ralph Roister Doister, Dobinet Doughtie; Sir Tophas, Epiton; Don Armado, Moth. (Reich.). Generally, like Falstaff's, the page is pert and impudent.

¹ Both features are in Pyrgopolinices.

² Part II, II, ii, 118.

³ Part I, II, iv, 11.

⁴ See Creizenach, IV, 350. For some details of the type I am indebted also to H. Graf, *Miles Gloriosus* (Rostock dissertation, 1892).

⁵ Other names: Spezzafer, Fracasso, Matamoros, Spezza-Monti, Giangurgolo, Vappo, Rogantino, etc.; and.

⁶ He has his landlady and tailor; has his gull Shallow as Quintiliano has his Innocentio and Giovanelli, and Bobadill has his Matthew; and yet he keeps Bardolph and perhaps Peto and Nym.

villain engrosses all criminal traits and a professional comic character all vicious ones,¹ Falstaff (as clown) already a cheat, a liar, a boaster, a glutton, a lecher, and a thief, could hardly help being a coward as well.

Much has been said about Falstaff being done from the life—even with George Peele or Henry Chettle for a model—but except in tone or in tricks of manner it is now evident that this could not be. The whole man or the tithe of him never trod the earth. Much, too, has been said of the Capitano and the Matamore arising out of intestine turmoil in Italy and the Spanish invasion, of the *miles gloriosus* arising out of the Roman wars in Asia and Africa, and of the Alazon out of the Alexandrian conquests. Something similar has been said of the *servus fallax* of Roman comedy, but Sellar's remark fits not only this case but the others. "Though a wonderful conception of the humorous imagination, it is a character hardly compatible with any social conditions."² Nothing is so rare as realism—nothing in itself so hateful to the public or by name so dear. The braggart captains, the valets who beat and bamboozle their masters, the nurses and chambermaids who scold them and thwart them in every wish, the women who put their husbands in bodily fear, and the timid and pure-minded maidens who upon provocation make love, and in men's clothing seek the beloved through field and forest in lands remote,³—all please only by their rarity or unreality, being incompatible with conditions under which women and servants knew no liberty, and a soldier stood or fell by his personal prowess alone. He sees deeper who finds that the marvelous exploits

¹ See below, p. 104. Jodelet has been called: "insolent, lubrique, hâbleur, et pardessus tout poltron." Of the vices of Panurge Rabelais (II, chap. 16) gives a famous catalogue, including lewdness, cozening, drinking, roystering, and thieving, but forgetting the rest of them—boasting, cruelty, and cowardice. Cingar and Pulci's Margutte have a still more formidable array of merry sins. And the same lavish style appears in other characters of the old Italian popular comedy than the Capitano, as the Bucco of the atellans, who was "suffisant, flatteur, fanfaron, voleur, lâche"; and Pulcinella, who besides these qualities inherits those of the Maccus, "vif, spirituel, un peu féroce" (Sand, I, 126). Compare in the sixteenth century the popular mythopoeic characterization of Machiavelli among the northern nations, especially in the drama, and of Luther among the southern.

² *Poets of the Republic* (Oxford, 1889), p. 170.

³ Those acquainted with the criticism of Shakespeare and Molière will remember that both a free-spoken soubrette, Toinette or Dorine, and Rosalind, with her gallant curtle-axe upon her thigh, have been thought representative of their times. Yet for a century before in the *novelle* and comedies of Italy and Spain, where maidens were guarded jealously, they, too, go seeking their lovers in male attire.

of Alexander provoked a boasting spirit of irony and satire in the Athenian public and playwrights.¹ Hence—directly out of the humorous imagination—these creations so extravagant and improbable.

The braggart captain, indeed, is incompatible with himself. Cowards do not go to war, or, if driven to it, do not become captains. Or if even that is not beyond the compass of chance and their own contriving, the clever ones do not boast so extravagantly as to rob themselves of credence and engage themselves in undertakings which it is farthest from their wish to fulfil. The huge and delectable contrasts of the old comedy involve contradictions as huge, and the spectators blinked fact—if indeed they were not blind to it—in the throes of their laughter. After Gadshill a fellow so clever would neither have let his lies grow on his hands nor—except on the defensive—have undertaken to lie at all. But how tame for an Elizabethan, to whom what is “gross, open, palpable” was a delight! Bulthaupt seriously wonders why Falstaff went to war, and concludes that he went exalted through his humor above all fear,² and as we have seen, Morgann (and many a critic since) has thought it fine and brave of him, and has dwelt fondly on the Prince’s preference of him to others for a charge of foot, on a dozen³ bareheaded sweating captains knocking at taverns and asking everyone for Sir John Falstaff, or on Falstaff’s leading⁴ his men where they are peppered. He might as well wonder why a monster of a miser like Harpagon keeps a coach and horses, a cook and a troop of servants, and conclude that he must be generous and open-handed after all. It is on the stage—it is in a comedy—and he keeps his servants to stint them, and the horses to get up nights and steal away their oats.⁵ And Falstaff goes to the wars to say his catechism, brandish a bottle for a pistol, fall dead, joke, cheat, and

¹ O. Ribbeck, *Alazon*, pp. 32–34.

² *Dramaturgie*, II, 74. He has reached a state of philosophic calm. “Er scheint seiner selbst so sicher dass er seine Ruhe oder die Freiheit seiner Seele auch in der kritischsten Lage nicht zu verlieren fürchtet.” Bradley speaks of his having “risen superior to all serious motives.”

³ A ballad-like exaggeration such as Shakespeare indulges himself in when it costs the company nothing. Like Capulet’s “twenty cunning cooks” they “stay at door”—do not tread the stage.

⁴ Mr. Bradley comments on the fact that it is “led” not “sent.”

⁵ A point made by Sarcey.

lie. In that day of prodigious contrasts and unchartered mirth a coward who does not rob on the highway or follow the wars—is no coward. To impute it to Falstaff's courage that he is in demand on the eve of war and goes to war without murmuring would mean that we must do the like to Parolles, who yearns for the wars in Italy and persuades his master to take him there; and to those "true-bred cowards" Ancient Pistol, Lieutenant Bardolph, and Corporal Nym, who, in the later play, follow the heroic young king into France. Falstaff goes to war to furnish matter for comedy, the Prince gives him a charge to get him to the war, and the dozen captains come sweating to fetch the laggard to his charge.¹

Two situations in which Falstaff is placed are connected with the *miles gloriosus* traditionally. The coward taking a captive is an incongruous and mirth-provoking situation which Shakespeare repeats in *Henry V* when Pistol, who, according to the Boy, has not a tenth of even Nym's or Bardolph's valor, captures Monsieur le Fer; and it appears before that in the fine old French farce of *Colin, fils de Thenot le Maire*, where the hero, boasting of a prisoner, is afraid to fetch him in because of his iron-bound staff, though he turns out to be a German pilgrim, not a Turk. Even so, Colin, like Falstaff and Pistol, might well "thank thee for thee." In all of these instances, moreover, there must have been much comic "business" furnished by the actors to remind us that the captor is a coward.² It is unthinkable that Pistol with his Frenchman should have been no funnier at the Globe than he is in the text.³

The other situation is that of the soldier who keeps his appetite,

¹ It matters not that the charge was given in Part I and that he was fetched in Part II. The situation is quite the same—on the eve of departure to the war.

² Morgann denies that Falstaff roared as he ran away because there is no stage direction, though the roaring is remarked upon by both Poins and the Prince. He might have supplied it. See Creizenach, *Englische Comödianten*, p. xcvi, for evidence, if that were necessary, that stage directions as we have them are very incomplete. So they are in printed plays today, and vastly they diminish in quantity as we go back through three centuries. At this point we should recall Viola pitted against Aguecheek as we have seen them on the stage, or the more explicit text of *L'Avantureux* (1521). "Ils reculent toujours pour prendre du champs et crient: À mort! à mort!" Cf. *Henry V*, II, 1, Nym and Pistol. Colville, of course, is no coward, but is comically mistaken.

³ The more general situation of the coward fighting the coward, or a woman, is common with the type: Falstaff fights Pistol and has a row with Quickly and her constables; Roister Doister is beaten by women; Thersites and Ambidexter fight with these and with snails and butterflies; and Giangurgolo, the Calabrian, gets into a rage with poor inoffensive people and fights with eunuchs (Sand, I, 202). Cf. Graf, p. 35.

though scared. Another contradiction, though to the ancients and the men of the Renaissance it betokened not coolness and presence of mind but a base and besotted nature, dead to name and fame.¹ Falstaff sleeps and snores while the watch seek for him and has his bottle on the field, just as Sosie, after he has run and hidden in the tent, drinks wine and eats ham.² And the putting of a bottle in his case for a pistol is a stranger contradiction still. According to our notions a coward would go armed to the teeth,³ but earlier art is prone to ignore analysis and present character in an outward and typical way.⁴ Time and again in Renaissance drama the coward finds his sword rusted in,⁵ or, drawing it, can show but the half of a blade, or, like Basilisco, a painted lath. Capitano had a spider's web around his sheath, and Harlequin, like the Greek beardless satyr,⁶ Pulcinella, at times,⁷ and the English Vice, wore as the symbol of his cowardice a wooden sword, not out of keeping with the rabbit scut⁸ in his hat. M. Jusserand has remarked upon the use of signs and symbols in mediaeval drama and painting—God on the stage in the habiliments of pope or bishop, and St. Stephen painted with a stone, not on his crown, but in his hand, St. Lawrence toying with his gridiron, or Samson being shorn in the lap of Delilah with the ass's jawbone still in his hand! Even in Goldoni's *Locandiera* the chicken-hearted Marchese's sword is rusted in, and when out is no

¹ In "*contempt of glory*," says Hazlitt (ed. 1864, p. 190), determined, as always, to make him superior to circumstances. Cf. his suggestion that Falstaff may have put the tavern-reckoning in his pocket "as a trick." And when he falls asleep, I suppose, he is feigning once more. On the contrary, his falling asleep may be no more than a device of the dramatist's to get his pocket picked without his knowing it.

² *Amphitryon*, I, ii. In Falstaff's case the wine may be there to bolster him up, or only to cool his thirst on a hot day. Cf. Part II, I, ii, 235.

³ Sometimes, indeed, the Matamore was so represented. Cf. Sand, I, 197. This later realism appears in *L'Avantureux*, and in *Jodelet Duelliste* when the coward takes all unfair precautions by securing the most formidable weapons and wearing concealed a cuirass and a steel cap (II, vii). Falstaff himself seems to appreciate the uses of a sword when he refuses to lend his to Hal, though this, again, may be no more than a device of the dramatist's to introduce the practical joke of the pistol.

⁴ Cf. the delight in discordant sounds attributed to the Malcontents Malevole and Jaques.

⁵ T. Jordan, *Pictures of Passions* (1641), *A Plundering Coward*: "A heavy iron sword, which fondly grows to the kinde scabbard." Cf. Middleton's *Witch*, v. i. The coward Aberganes cannot draw, and does "not care to see it—'tis only a holiday thing to wear at a man's side."

⁶ *Grande Encyclopaedie*, s.v. "Arlequin."

⁷ Sand, I, 132.

⁸ Sand, I, 68.

more than a stump; and in this case, as in the others, the point is not that the character is afraid of cold steel, or "naked weapons," but that his martial profession is a burlesque and fraud. In the *miles* it is a touch in sympathy and keeping with the whole extravagant and external scheme.

Further consideration of Falstaff's cowardice depends on the "incomprehensible lies" of the buckram story and the problems which they involve. By most English critics they are thought to be no lies but mere "waggery" to amuse himself or the Prince;¹ by some Germans they are considered to be a case of unconscious exaggeration.² No one, so far as I know,³ has suggested that Falstaff undertakes to deceive, and yet without intending a jest falls into the preposterous exaggerations and contradictions of a sailor or fisherman spinning a yarn. Still a scamp, he is no longer a wit. As for the intention to deceive, that in the light of what we have already said about the Elizabethan practical joke should, to any student of the period, be apparent. Poins's prediction is fulfilled to the letter—"how thirty at least he fought with; what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured"—and is further confirmed by the purposed fraud of his "monstrous devices." And as for the unconscious exaggerations and contradictions, he is like the Playboy of the Western World, who at first says that he riz the loy and let fall the edge on his father's skull; later says that he halved his skull; then that he split him to the knob of his gullet; then that with one blow he cleft him to the breeches belt.⁴ Only, in Christy Mahon's case, the intervals between these exaggerations are so wide, the motivation provided in them by the admiration of his hearers and his own waxing enthusiasm so subtle and complete, that his reputation for

¹ Morgann, Hazlitt, Lloyd, Maginn, Wetz (p. 406), Bradley (p. 264), Professor Matthews (p. 129), though it does not seem like him.

² Wolff, I, 426; but like most of the Germans he refuses to entertain the notion that Falstaff also meant to deceive. Bulthaupt (II, 72-73), troubled with the inconsistency of the character, seems to take the middle course of having Falstaff half in earnest, half in jest.

³ Gervinus (Lon., 1863, i, pp. 452, 453) and Wolff (I, 425) seem to approach it, but probably mean no more than "witty myself and the cause that wit is in other men" (Part II, I, ii, 11). And by that Falstaff means only that he furnishes others matter for mirth by his personal appearance.

⁴ Such a comparison is not illegitimate. Synge abounds in old farcical material, dating back to the fabliaux, though, as here, treated with modern delicacy.

intelligence hardly suffers. Falstaff piles up his exaggerations pell-mell, despite the interrupting jeers of the Prince and Poins, and turns at once from wit to butt.

Here lies an incongruity¹ greater than any we have met, and to understand it we must look about us, as the commentator does when he is puzzled by a phrase of the text in contemporary drama. The situation is the same as that in Heywood's *Fair Maid* cited above. The only difference is that between great art and small; for in the same period a great popular artist and a mediocre one use the same means of expression—"business," situations, and types. That is to say, the difference is in the touch. In both cases before us there is the cowardly action deliberately misrepresented in the report by means of gross exaggerations and contradictions,² satirically noticed by the hearer but without effect upon the speaker. Roughman is not witty, to be sure, nor, once started, does he let his numbers grow. But, like Falstaff not a fool, he too makes a fool of himself with his story.

That Falstaff the wit should thus turn into a butt involves a lack of unity and consistency in the portrayal which in higher art is nowadays impossible but was then not rare. He was the comic character—men asked no more. Contradictions enough we have found already in the *miles*. According to Reich,³ moreover, the Hindoo *Vidusaka*, the Roman *scurra*, and the Greek γελωτοποιός were often not only wits who jested at others' and their own expense, but like the court fool were the butts of others' jokes, practical and verbal. And the same may be said of the Elizabethan stage fools and clowns.⁴ With some of his Shakespeare goes as far as with Falstaff, though turning the character not so much into a butt as into a buffoon.

Launce, for instance, is quick and expert at jest and repartee, punning and word-splitting, gets the better of Speed and others who

¹ Bulthaupt has felt it, and stated it more clearly and fully than anyone else, but he undertakes no explanation.—*Dramaturgie*, II, 72-73.

² Morgann (p. 138) makes much of the circumstance that Falstaff's braggadocios are after the fact, not before it. But this is the case with a number of cowards. Ruzante in Beolco's First Dialogue, getting up from the ground, brags about what he would have done if his rival had been there alone instead of "one of a hundred"; Swash, in Day's *Blind Beggar of Bednall Green*, echoing Falstaff, declares, "I very manfully killed seven of the six," though the rest carried away the money; Robin in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion*; Protaldy in *Thierry and Theodoret*, II, iv.

³ *Mimus*, pp. 24, 736, 866, etc.

⁴ Eckhardt, p. 255.

are pitted against him, and sees through his master's perfidy when others fail. Yet at times he confounds¹ words in the style of Malaprop and Partington, "misplaces" and talks contradictory nonsense like the Shakespearean constables,² craftily withholds information one moment and unconsciously blabs it out the next,³ and, like Sosie,⁴ when he undertakes to tell of his parting with dramatic directness and exactitude gets his tale hopelessly tangled and muddled. Similarly in *Measure for Measure* Pompey Bum has to his credit some of the shrewdest sayings in the play,⁵ and yet confuses words like *respect* and *suspect*, *suppose* and *depose*, *instant* and *distant*, and, like Dogberry, wanders and flounders in his story of Mistress Elbow and Master Froth without the wit to suspect it. "Why very well," he cries delighted, "I hope here be truths!" These and other clowns Professor Eckhardt, also bent upon unity, has been under the necessity of interpreting as stupid intentionally, laughing, like the canonical Falstaff, in their sleeves.⁶ Of this there are instances, no doubt; but on the Elizabethan stage, as we have seen, feigning is, as it begins, explicitly indicated, or else is manifest from the situation and the sudden change of tone; and without such warrant it seems unscientific to have recourse to this method of obviating a contradiction or harmonizing a discord.⁷ As Professor Eckhardt himself has remarked and perhaps everybody has noticed, in many Elizabethan plays all the comic characters are witty, and of those classes into which Professor Eckhardt has ranged all the professional clowns and jesters of Elizabethan drama, by far the largest are those who are only "prevailingly" wits and jesters and those who are only "prevailingly" clowns and dolts. As in *Harlequin*⁸ and the "patch" in the circus-ring, wit mixed with stupidity is the quicker to tickle the public taste. Nor does the one blend with or leaven the other. Launce and Pompey are both wits *and* clowns.

¹ *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II, iii, 4, etc.

² II, iii, 11 and 13 (cf. *Measure for Measure*, II, i, 90). Cf. Elbow, Dogberry, Verges, Dull.

³ III, i, 265.

⁴ *Amphitryon*, I, i.

⁵ I, ii; II, i, 234 ff.

⁶ Eckhardt, pp. 255, 411. From this exhaustive work most of the facts used in this paragraph are derived.

⁷ Cf. below, another instance—and another method—with Polonius.

⁸ "Un mélange d'ignorance, de naïveté, d'esprit, de bêtise, et de grâce" (*Sand*, I, 75).

Such is Falstaff; nor is this *naïveté* missing at other times, as in his remorse. In the first scene in which he appears Falstaff falters in his jollity and vows that he will give over this life, being now little better than one of the wicked. "Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?" "Zounds!" he shouts, "where thou wilt, lad!" On a blue Monday at the Boar's Head he is for repenting once more as he moodily contemplates his wasting figure. Bardolph complains of his fretfulness. "Why, *there* is it. Come sing me a bawdy song; make me merry!" If in this he be self-conscious, how annoying and unnatural! Those numerous critics who to keep for Falstaff his reputation as a humorist have him here play a part, seem to do so at the expense of their own. It is not to be wondered at in Hegel and some few German critics¹ that, with philosophy in their every thought, they should shake their heads at the unenlightenment of Aristophanes, and turning their backs on Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Molière should proclaim the highest species of humor to be intentional and conscious; but it is to be wondered at in Englishmen. What joke could be made of this equal to the unconscious comical effect of the old sensualist plunged in penitence, and spontaneously buoyed up again, as by a specific levity? "Peace, good Doll"—and here, too, he is not jesting but saying it with a shudder—"do not speak like a death's head; do not bid me remember mine end." The pith of the humor lies in the huge appetite for purses, or mirth, bursting in an instant the bonds of his penitence; just as it lies in his thirst swallowing up the memory that his lips are not yet dry. "Give me a cup of sack! I am a rogue if I drunk to-day!"² He is as unconscious as inconsistency has been on the comic stage ever since—as Molière's philosopher who declaims against wrath and presently gives way to it, or the duennas of Steele and Sheridan, who deprecate love and marriage for their nieces at the moment when they seek it for themselves.

Naïve, then, as well as witty, and quite as much the cause of mirth in other men when he is least aware, Falstaff is less "incomprehen-

¹ Ulrici, etc., but not Gervinus; cf. Wetz, pp. 402-3; Hegel (cited by Wetz), *Ästhetik*. III, 576.

² Such instances Wetz (p. 406), under the influence of Lloyd, considers intentional jokes, despite his insistence on Falstaff's *naïveté*. Bradley and other English critics agree.

sible" both in his lies and, as we shall presently see, in his conduct generally. His wit is expended, not in making himself ridiculous for the sake of a joke unshared and unuttered, but, by hook or by crook, in avoiding that. Dryden long ago remarked as his special accomplishments his shifts and quick evasions; and Jonson, his "easy scapes and sallies of levity." "His wit lies in those things he says *praeter expectatum*, unexpected by the audience; his quick evasions when you imagine him surprised, which, as they are extremely diverting of themselves, so receive a great addition from his person."¹ Morgann, Lloyd,² Maginn,³ and even Mr. Bradley⁴ find this all too simple, and, wrenching both plot⁵ and character in the process, have him lie in no expectation of being believed, step into traps for the fun of wriggling out, and bid for gibes at his own expense. Losing is as good as winning, and Falstaff is out for exercise and his health! But from Aristophanes and Plautus down through the Renaissance to the present-day Eloquent Dempsey of Mr. William Boyle there is a continual succession of characters who are well content to use their wits as they may to keep from smarting for their follies. Particularly is this the case with cowards and braggarts, with Panurge,⁶ Capitano Spavento, and the various Elizabethan specimens of the Captain—

¹ *Dramatic Poesy*, p. 43.

² *Essays* (1875), p. 223; as when he says "When thou wilt, lad," etc., or "I'm a rogue," etc.

³ P. 51: "It was no matter whether he invented what tended to laughter or whether it was invented upon him." It is true that he is not resentful or sulky, but what clown is?

⁴ *Oxford Lectures*, pp. 264-65. In treating Falstaff's mendacity Mr. Bradley fails to observe distinctions which, as it seems to me, are required by the exigencies of dramatic technique and which then would have been observed by an audience instinctively. Falstaff's braggadocios and his vowing himself a rogue if he had drunk today, are, though lies, very different in spirit and purpose from the shifts and evasions by which, like Aristotle below, he turns all to merriment and half saves the day. Still another sort of lie is that which serves no practical purpose—offends no idealistic scruples—his jest about his corpulence being due to sighing and grief and his voice being cracked by singing of anthems. But Mr. Bradley rhetorically asks those who think that Falstaff expected to be believed in his buckram story whether he expected to be believed in these other cases as well. To make Falstaff, if a whole-hearted liar in one case, a whole-hearted liar in all, is like making Iago a liar even in soliloquy.

"I suppose they consider that Falstaff was in earnest," he continues, "when, wanting to get twenty-two yards of satin on trust, he offered Bardolph as security." That is not a lie at all—is a case in no sense parallel to the others; but certainly he was as much in earnest as when he cheated Quickly and Shallow. He afterward makes it plain that he had expected to get the satin (Part II, I, ii, 48-50). "Or even when he sold his soul on Good Friday to the devil for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg." And that Falstaff never says, but the jeering and jesting Poins.

⁵ See below, p. 90.

⁶ Book IV, chap. 67, where he blames for his condition the famous cat Rodilardus.

Parolles,¹ Bobadill, Bessus, Braggadino, and Sir Tophas. After saving their bacon their dearest desire is to save their face. Even those romancing liars whose cowardice is not in grain, Peer Gynt and Christy Mahon, are far from courting failure and discredit.

Some of the most famous of Falstaff's shifts are in other plays actually duplicated. In *Look about You*, printed in 1600, Fauconbridge, having in ignorance of her presence spoken slightly of his wife, avails himself of the evasion to which, when it is suggested, Falstaff scorns to resort for a second time, having still another at hand:

*I knew thee, Moll; now by my sword I knew thee;
I winked at all; I laughed at every jest.*—Sc. 28.

And like Falstaff he is laughed at for it more than his jest. In Middleton's *Family of Love* it is the woman that is caught, and she knew thee as well as the child knows his own father—"I knew him to be my husband even by very instinct." So in Cicognini's *Don Juan*, Passarino, still more cowardly than his equivalent Leporello or Sganarelle, when surprised in a soliloquy far from loyal to his master, cries in panic, "Faith, I saw you coming and I was only joking."² Beaumont's Bessus, again, when taken to task declares that "Bessus the coward wronged you, and shall Bessus the valiant maintain what Bessus the coward did?" And to a man who beats him he confesses that he "shall think him a valiant fellow for all this." For the three English sayings this is the model:

Why thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was now a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life: I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince.

Thus before or after him, some of Falstaff's shifts, like his "monstrous devices" and his *lazzi* on the battlefield, were the recognized property of a double-dealer and poltroon.

If Falstaff steps into the trap on purpose and is, as Mr. Bradley says, aware that his slanders upon the Prince will be repeated to him, and, as most Englishmen say, went to Gadshill only for a lark, and, as Lloyd and Maginn suspect, actually knew the Prince and Poins,

¹ *All's Well*, I, i, 215, and see above.

² *Il Convitato di Pietra*, sc. 28: "A v'havva vist alla fè, e per quest a burlava così."

ran and roared to hold the good jest up, and hacked his sword and bloodied his own and his companions' clothing on the certain calculation that he should be betrayed,¹ little enough would depend on his evasions. Actually, as with all stage cowards, here lies the center of interest.² The Prince and Poins press him hard:

Prince: What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

Poins: Come, let's hear, Jack; what trick hast thou now?—Part I, II, iv, 293.

Prince: I shall drive you to confess the wilful abuse, and then I know how to handle you.

Poins: Answer, thou dead elm, answer.—Part II, II, iv, 338.

At times his embarrassment is as manifest as their glee, and he turns from bluster to coaxing and wheedling:

Falstaff: No abuse, Hal.

Poins: No abuse?

Fal.: No abuse, Ned, i' the world; honest Ned, none.³—Part II, II, iv, 290-94.

In his wit lies the only difference between his evasions and those of Bessus, Bobadill, or Jodelet. Theirs, comical often without humor like those of Bacchus and Xanthias in the *Frogs*, are mere excuses and do not save them;⁴ Falstaff's are as unpalatable and far-fetched as theirs, but, as Poins forbodes, they deliberately "drive the Prince out of his revenge and turn all to a merriment." They are laughed at, but often they turn the laugh. They are jests for profit, as Burckhardt⁵ would no doubt have called them, for profit and delight, and little akin to that pale species reared by philosophy and philanthropy, which craves no hearing but, like virtue, is its own reward. They are such jests as those of Shakespeare's clowns or fools when they beg or are threatened, those of Sancho Panza and Panurge, Eulenspiegel and

¹ Quoted freely from Lloyd, p. 224; Maginn, pp. 47, 51.

² As for the Capitano, see Herman Grimm, *Essays* (1859), p. 165; for other braggart cowards see Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du Théâtre: La Comédie*, p. 258.

³ Cf. a similar passage, Part I, II, iv, 260-64.

⁴ *Every Man in His Humour*, IV, v, "Sure, I was struck with a planet thence"; IV, vii, "I was fascinated, by Jupiter" (so Ruzzante suffers from enchantment); *A King and No King*, III, ii; *Jodelet Maître-Valet*, IV, vii, "Quoi! c'est votre neveu? Je ne me bats pas!" etc.

⁵ *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1890), p. 157.

Kalenberg, or those in the old fabliaux. In one of these last, indeed, the celebrated *Lai d'Aristote* of d'Andeli, there is an evasion, remarkably like some of Falstaff's, of which the purpose and effect are specifically indicated. We remember: "Thou knowest that in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man," etc. Again we remember: "I dispraised him before the wicked that the wicked might not fall in love with him; in which doing, I have done the part of a careful friend and a true subject," etc. In the same spirit Aristotle when, having rebuked Alexander for giving way to carnal pleasures, he is discovered as he goes bridled and saddled and ridden by the vindictive damsel through the garden, cries to his jeering sovereign:

Sire, fait-il, vos dites voir!
 Mais or poés vos bien savoir:
 J'oi droit que je doutai de vos,
 Car en fin jovent ardés tos
 Et en fu droite jouenece,
 Quant jo qui sui plains de vellece
 Ne puis contre amor rendre estal
 Qu'ele ne m'ait torné a mal
 Li grant com vos avés véu.
 Quant que j'ai apris et léu
 M'a desfait nature en i eure
 Qui tote science deveure
 Pus qu'ele s'en veut entremetre;
 Et se jo voil dont paine metre
 A vos oster de sa prison,

So he too turns all to merriment. Alexander congratulates the damsel on the revenge she had furnished them, but

tant s'en fu bien escusés
 De ce que il fu amusés
 Qu'en riant li rois li pardonne.

So Falstaff seeks neither to "amuse the Prince" nor to excuse himself, but does both together as the better way of reaching either end.

All this reasoning is founded, I hope, on what is simple and sensuous, and therefore truly of the stage. The fatal objection to the theory that Falstaff is feigning and literally "looking for trouble"

is that he keeps his joke to himself. There are no such jokes on the stage. At least it must have got into a soliloquy—in Shakespeare's time it must needs have been thrust upon the notice of the Prince and Poins and have covered them with confusion. In Shakespeare the battle is to the strong, success never looks like failure, or honor like dishonor, and for him and his audience it is not a humorous thing to keep one's humor hid. Perhaps there was never a more amazing transformation in the history of criticism than this of our fat knight into a sort of Andrea del Sarto,—

I, *jesting* from myself and to myself,
Know what I do—am not moved by men's blame
Or their praise either.

Now this principle of a looser unity, which is the main thread we have been tracing—of identity in the dramatic function and tone rather than in mental quality and processes—explains much else in Falstaff. The quickness and readiness with which he faces about, which prompts Bulthaupt to think that in his boasting he is not sincere, is due simply to the fact that here he is wit again, not buffoon. It is required of him to be entertaining rather than plausible. And this explains his so-called presence of mind, his joking amid carnage and in the teeth of death. It is not that he is a Mercutio, game to the last, but that he jokes regardless of psychological propriety, as Elizabethan clowns do whether in battle or in the house of mourning, or as Sosia does, trembling before Mercury,¹ or the gracioso Guarin does, in Calderon's *Puente de Mantible*,² though much frightened, with the giant, or the cowardly Polidoro, in *El Mayor Monstruo*, though threatened with immediate hanging.

Looser unity, moreover, irrelevancy, or carelessness of detail—it matters not which, for probably Shakespeare seldom conceived his characters apart from the plot—explains quite as well as the tradition of the *miles* the fact that in other ways Falstaff ceases for moments to be a coward. His fighting with Pistol, from which Mr. Bradley says a stock coward would have shrunk, and his capturing Colville and exchanging a blow or two with Hal and Poins on Gads-hill are like the conduct of the gracioso Brito in Calderon's *Principe*

¹ *Amphitryon* of Plautus and of Molière, sc. 1.

² II, x and xi.

Constante,¹ who, after falling and feigning death like Falstaff, starts up and secures a fresh comic effect by chasing off the stage the two Moors who come to rob his body; or of Ambidexter, in *Cambyses*, who beats Huf, Ruf, and Snuf before he himself is beaten by the women; or of Sganarelle, who, after his pigeon-livered soliloquy cited below, appears, crying out upon his enemy, in full armor—to keep off the rain! or of Panurge and Cingar, who, though cowards, having many vices besides, exhibit them, as Falstaff does his thievishness and his bibulousness on the battlefield, as if their cowardice were quite forgotten. Though “of blows he was naturally fearful,” in the campaign against the Dipsodes Panurge is as bold as brass and as cool as a cucumber.² And Pulcinella, we have seen, is both *lâche* and *féroce*.

Elsewhere as well Shakespeare does not keep strictly to his scheme. Shylock is conceived in prejudice, doomed to ridicule and dishonor, yet is given now and then a touch of incompatible tenderness.³ Polonius is sensible enough at first, yet in the second act he is indeed an “ass.”⁴ And as for the “indecorum” of Falstaff’s presence unabashed and unreprieved before the King at Shrewsbury, of which Morgann and his followers complain (unless indeed it be granted them as an intentional compliment to his valor, or evidence of his being an established courtier and “counsellor of state”),⁵ why in Elizabethan drama are fools⁶ and clowns forever elbowing kings or emperors without a ghost of a pretext or excuse? To jest, and Falstaff jests. “Peace, chewet, peace!” cries the Prince to our “counsellor” once really, according to Elizabethan notions,

¹ I, xiv and xx.

² In Book II, chaps. 27, 29, he gives a cry of pleasure at the approaching conflict, and he creeps among the fallen and cuts their throats. Yet see at the close of chap. 21 his fright when blows are threatened; (IV, chap. 5) when Dingdong draws his sword; (IV, chaps. 19, 23, 24) when there is a storm at sea; (chaps. 66, 67) when there is cannonading.

³ See my article “Shylock” (cited above), p. 276.

⁴ See Mr. A. B. Walkley, *op. cit.* Urged by the craving for unity, as usual, critics have found the wisdom of Polonius in I, iii, jejune and insipid. So is the Duke’s, then, in *Measure for Measure*, III, i, and that of many another moralist in Shakespeare. And even if jejune and insipid, “hard and unvital,” it is not silly, not asinine, and the character is not much more of a unit than before. Coleridge, urged by the same craving, finds him too wise to be meant for a comic character!

⁵ Morgann, pp. 43–44.

⁶ In this case, of course, there is often the reason that they belong to the household.

the decorum is broken. About as much is to be made of Falstaff's presence in the council as of his "familiarity" with John of Gaunt and Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. Once upon a time he joked with the one, and in his youth he was page to the other. In Elizabethan drama anybody jokes with a king and a king jokes with anybody, and Falstaff wins little credit with us for once having tried it with John of Gaunt in the Tiltyard. What does it matter, moreover, whether, as Morgann and Maginn will have it, he is a gentleman? So is Panurge,¹ and a coward, and "a very dissolute and debauched fellow if there were any in Paris." The pith and root of the matter is that criticism has no right thus to insist upon details and follow them up further—his seal ring worth forty mark, his bonds, and his pension² (if ever he had them) as tokens of respectability—for in the treatment of these Shakespeare and his fellows were even more self-contradictory and unplausible than we have already seen him to be in matters of capital importance. Sancho rides his stolen ass again before he has recovered her, and Comus, as he welcomes "midnight shout and revelry" and "the secret flames of midnight torches," now finds the star "that bids the shepherd fold" at the top of heaven.³ What then could be expected of one who was not writing for print?

So far nothing has been said of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* because of the prevalent opinion that this Falstaff is another man. Here he is a butt and no mistake. But Mr. Bradley himself says that there are speeches in the play recognizable as Falstaff's in quantity sufficient to fill one side of a sheet of note-paper. Moreover, the figure of the braggart captain who came into Shakespeare's hands from Plautus or from the *Comedy of Masks* would have been incomplete if he had not appeared as the suitor gulled.⁴ Yet all that I care to insist upon is that in this play as in *Henry IV* the supreme comical figure is again both butt and wit. Again for purposes of mirth he fails to see through the tricks played upon him, and yet, though

¹ Book II, chap. 9: "Nature hath extracted him from some rich and noble race."

² Morgann, p. 59. The pension, of course, he is only expecting—or *says* he is expecting.

³ I am aware that "top" has been made to mean not top but "fairly high up" in the heavens; which shows how much more precious in the eyes of a commentator is consistency than the gift of expression. There is no meaning to the phrase unless it be that time has passed and the star in the western sky is now higher than it was.

⁴ This is the lot of both Pyrgopolinices and the Capitano.

he is clever enough, surely nobody will have him feigning and dissembling, or trying to "amuse" himself or the women of Windsor by chivalrously falling in with their vindictive schemes.

A coward, then, if ever there was one, has Falstaff a philosophy? Military freethinking has been attributed to him to lift the stigma on his name. Believing not in honor, he is not bound by it. And by the Germans¹ and Mr. Bradley, as we have remarked, the scope of his philosophy has been widened, and he has been turned into a practical Pyrrhonist and moral nihilist, to whom virtue is "a fig," truth absurd, and all the obligations of society stumbling-blocks and nuisances. In various ways, by the English and the Germans alike, he has been thought to deny and destroy all moral values and ideals of life, not only for his own but for our behoof. So in a certain sense he is inspired by principle—of an anarchistic sort—not void of it.

Only at one ideal—honor—does Falstaff seem to me to cavil, and that he is only shirking and dodging. How does he, as Mr. Bradley thinks, make truth absurd by lying; or law, by evading the attacks of its highest representative; or patriotism, by abusing the King's press and filling his pockets with bribes?² Or matrimony (logic would not forbear to add) by consorting with Mistresses Ursula, Quickly, and Tearsheet, thus lifting us into an atmosphere of freedom indeed? It fairly makes your head turn to see a simple picaresque narrative like that of Panurge or Sir Toby Belch brought to such an upshot as that.

As it seems to me, his catechism on the battlefield and his deliverances on honor³ are to be taken not as coming from his heart of hearts but from his wits and to cover his shame.⁴ Like disreputable characters in mediaeval and Renaissance drama and fiction without number, he unconsciously gives himself away. His "philosophy" is but a shift and evasion, and in his catechism he eludes the claim of honor when put by his conscience just as he does when put by the

¹ In various degrees by Ulrici, Gervinus, Rötischer, Vischer, Graf, and Bulthaupt. The only one who explicitly dissents is Wetz. Wolff (I, 422), though he finds in Falstaff no depths of philosophy, does not look upon the "catechism" as a confession of cowardice.

² *Oxford Lectures*, pp. 262-63.

³ Part I, V, i, 127-43; iii, 61-65; iv, 110-30.

⁴ Cf. Wetz.

Prince and Poin. When he declares discretion to be the better part of valor there is no more philosophy in him than in Panurge and the Franc Archier de Baignollet when they avow that they fear nothing but danger, or than in himself when he swears that instinct is a great matter, and purse-taking no sin but his vocation. When he cries "Give me life" and "I like not the grinning honor that Sir Walter hath," there is no more Pyrrhonism or Epicureanism in him than there is idealism when, in defending his choice of the unlikeliest men for his company, he cries, "Give me the spirit, Master Shallow," meaning, "give me the crowns and shillings, Mouldy and Bullcalf." Here as there, he only dodges and shuffles. As in his fits of remorse we have seen, he is not "dead to morality" or free from its claims; neither does he frankly oppose them, or succeed in "covering them with immortal ridicule"; but in sophistry he takes refuge from them and the ridicule rebounds on his own head.

Half a dozen egregious cowards in Shakespeare's time, at any rate, talk in Falstaff's vein when in danger, and yet are not, and cannot be, thought philosophers for their pains. The coward and braggart Basilisco, with whom Shakespeare was acquainted, goes through a catechism before action, too, on the power of death and the futility of love and honor in the face of it.¹ What is at the back of his mind a child could see. The nearest other parallels are independent of Shakespeare, but are fashioned by the same ironical and satiric spirit. In Molière's *Cocu imaginaire*, Sganarelle subtilizes on death and a husband's honor much as Falstaff does on death and a soldier's honor. Discretion is his pet virtue too.

Je ne suis point battant, de peur d'être battu,
Et l'humeur débonnaire est ma grande vertu;

and if in this faith he should waver, once play the bold fellow, and get for his virtue a villainous thrust in the paunch—

Que par la ville ira le bruit de mon trépas,
Dites-moi, mon honneur, en serez vous plus gras?

"Give me life," once more, not grinning honor—

Qu'il vaut mieux être encor cocu que trépassé;

¹ *Soliman and Perseda*, V, iii, 63-95. The parallel being well known, I do not dwell on it. Shakespeare's acquaintance with the play is proved by *King John*, I, i, 244.

and therefore he considers whether loss of honor can damage the limbs as Falstaff considers whether the winning of honor will mend them:

Quel mal cela fait-il? la jambe en devient-elle
Plus tortue, après tout, et la taille moins belle?

Before the scene is over he confesses his cowardice explicitly and in scene xxi, as we have noticed, it becomes apparent in deed.

Another arrant coward, also self-confessed, Jodelet in Scarron's *Jodelet Duelliste* (1646),¹ inveighs against honor as a silly thing, causing much inconvenience, and considers the damage done because of it to various parts of the body, through the least puncture in which the spirit may escape—through puncture in heart, liver, kidney, lungs, or an artery—gods! the very thought takes his breath! And he "likes not" death because it is stupid,² and too "forward" with a fellow,

Et sans considérer qui la veut ou refuse,
L'indiscrète qu'elle est, grippe, vousft ou non,
Pauvre, riche, poltron, vaillant, mauvais et bon (V, i).

So in the earlier play, *Jodelet Maître-Valet*, when he considers:

Que le corps enfin doit pourrir,
Le corps humain, où la prudence
Et l'honneur font leur résidence,
Je m'afflige jusqu' au mourir.
Quoi! cinq doigts mis sur une face! (IV, ii).

For, as in the later play, he has had his ears boxed, and the better part is discretion.

Thus continually in the popular farces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries cowardice coquets with prudence, discretion, or philanthropy, but in thrusting back the claims of honor only betrays, as in Falstaff, terror at what comes in its trail. It gives itself away by an irony which recoils like a boomerang. Falstaff's discretion, Moron's "bon sens," Parolles' "for advantage,"³ and even humaner

¹ Cited in Despois, *Molière*, t. II, 198-200, where also is cited the parallel of Falstaff's catechism. Cf. also M. de Pourceaugnac (III, ii), who disclaims the fear of death as he flees from the law in the garb of a woman, but thinks it "fâcheux à un gentilhomme d'être pendu."

² "Camuse."

³ *All's Well*, I, ii, 215.

sentiments are the subterfuges of cowards on the popular stage in Venice and Nürnberg as in London and Paris. In the old farce *L'Avantureux*, Guillot has fled from Marolles but retired at his ease as far as—to Pontoise!—for a soldier who is quick to strike

Se doibt bien tenir loin.
Jamais je n'eus intention
De faire homicidation.¹

Likewise the Franc Archier de Baignollet retreats (for to him as to Sancho retreating is not fleeing) only a trifle, from Angers to Lyons. And Ruzzante in Beolco's First Dialogue is even of the opinion, born of immediate experience, that to run and hide takes a lot of courage.² Possibly the closest parallel to Falstaff's gammon about honor appears in a fifteenth century Fastnachtspiel, in which the faint-hearted knights excuse themselves from following the Emperor into battle. The Second Knight says:

Scholt ich mich da geben zu sterben,
Das ich da mit solt er erwerben,
Was möcht mir die er gefrumen
Wenn ich nit mocht her wider kumen?
Wann ich hab selbs daheim er und gut
Und ain schöns weib, das gibt mir mut.³

Somewhat like are the others, and the Fourth Knight stipulates that he shall be permitted to ride to the charge behind the Emperor, because to ride before does not beseem him, and

ich will eben zu sehen
Von wem euch schaden sei geschehen.

On both Emperor and Ausschreier all this makes but one impression—and at the end they say as much—that of cowardice unalloyed. Somewhat the same are the sentiments of Panurge, and the ironical method is more obvious in him than in any:

Let's whip it away, I never find myself to have a bit of Courage at Sea: In Cellars and elsewhere I have more than enough: Let's fly, and save our Bacon. I do not say this for any Fear that I have; for I dread nothing

¹ *Ibid.*, II. 130–40. The same sentiment is a pretext of Ruzzante (cited below) to explain why he brings no booty home from war.

² (Venezia, 1565) f. 5: "le un gran cuore chi se mette muzzare."

³ Keller (1853), No. 75.

but Danger, that I don't: I always say it, that shouldn't. . . . We'll lose no Honour by flying; Demosthenes saith, That the man that runs away may fight another time.—IV, chap. 55 (cf. chap. 23).

All these cowardly characters have a burlesque "philosophy" comparable to Falstaff's, which in their case cannot extenuate the shame and therefore should not in his. Like Falstaff they but make of it a veil of dissimulation, and drolly peep from behind it. Here lingers mediaeval satire as we find it in capital form in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, or in the old farce of the widow who hears, as the bells toll for her husband's death, the heavenly admonition

Pren ton valet, pren ton valet,¹

and as people were clever enough to take that for nothing but the unconscious confession of a lascivious spirit, so they took Falstaff's and these other fellows' discretion and prudence and aversion to grinning honor and stupid death, not by any means for what to our eager sympathy they seem to be. That in all its transparency this satiric and ironical understatement is not foreign to Shakespeare's method with Falstaff in general appears not only in many of his evasions, as we have seen, but in his famous talk with Bardolph, alluded to above:

—virtuous enough, swore little, diced not above seven times a week, went to a bawdy-house not above once in a quarter—of an hour, paid money that I borrowed three or four times.

And as elsewhere it is used in Shakespeare, in Shylock's outcries—

I would my daughter were dead at my foot—and the jewels in her ear. Would she were hearsed at my foot—and the ducats in her coffin . . .²

and used by Molière or by Sheridan, or by so recent a dramatist as Robertson, the humor, like that involved in Falstaff's "incomprehensible lies" and his remorse, seems meant to be unconscious, not intentional.³

¹ *Robinet Badin*. Le Roux de Lincy, t. III, 142.

² See my article, "Shylock," p. 274. This punctuation is mine.

³ *Malade imaginaire*, I, ix, near end, Béline's similar after-thoughts; *School for Scandal*, IV, iii, "who never in my life denied him—my advice"; *Rivals*, V, iii, "He generally kills a man a week, don't you Bob? Acres: Ay—at home!"; *Caste*, III, i, 239, *Eccles*: "Nothing like work—for the young," etc.

One reason why in Falstaff we fail to penetrate this mask of unrealistic and malicious portrayal, and take his words to heart, is that they are in soliloquy. A man does not banter himself. But on the stage in those times and before them a man did, and all soliloquy is phrased more as if the character were addressing himself or the audience than as if he were thinking aloud. Hence in comic soliloquy¹ allowances are to be made, just as later, when Falstaff holds forth on sack as the cause of valor, which is another underhand confession of cowardice, and when Benedick declares that the world must be peopled, which is a confession of a tenderer sort.² It is an irony which touches the speaker, not the thing spoken of, and dissolves away not all the seriousness of life but the speaker's pretenses; it is the exposure, not the expression, of his "inmost self."³ When Falstaff seems to be talking principle, he is, as we now say, only "putting it mildly": in his own time he gave himself away; in ours he takes the learned in.

But the main reason for our failure to penetrate the mask is that in or out of soliloquy this particular method of dramatic expression is a thing outworn, outgrown. Characters are no longer driven to banter or expose themselves, or the better audiences resent it if they are. Psychology—born of sympathy—will have none of it, as a method too external, ill-fitting, double-tongued. If the person be taken to be consciously jesting—the widow about wedding while mourning, Falstaff about the vanity of honor, or Robertson's Eccles about the wholesomeness of work—he seems then and there to be out of character; yet it is hard to see how he can have been unconscious, either, and it is manifest that the author is more intent on the jest, or, in the case of Quickly above, on the double entendre, than on the main or philosophic drift;—and yet (once again) this self-consciousness and mirth surely do not imply, as in the writing of today they must needs imply, "freedom" or detachment, any measure of indifference or superiority to the pleasure of incontinently

¹ See my articles: "Anachronism in Shakespeare Criticism," *Modern Philology*, April, 1910, pp. 561-62; "Criminals in Shakespeare," *ibid.*, July, 1912, pp. 68-69; "Hamlet and Iago." Such cases as the present or such as Hamlet's self-reproaches are the only ones where statements in soliloquy are to be discounted. Nothing subconscious can be intended.

² *Much Ado*, II, iii, 227-55. Wetz compares this soliloquy with Falstaff's.

³ Wetz, pp. 402-3, quoting Röttscher.

taking one's valet, keeping one's arms and legs whole, or sponging in bibulous sloth. The pith of the matter, then, is that the lines of the character are, for us, confused, the author seems to peer through and wink at the audience, and our modern sympathy and craving for reality are vexed and thwarted, somewhat as they are by the self-consciousness of the villains or by the butt-and-wit-in-one. Indeed, unless the character be taken to be unconscious, we seem here to have a case of butt-and-wit-in-one at one and the same moment. For these reasons this method of comic portrayal, which goes back at least to the Middle Ages, and occurs not only in Elizabethan comic drama but in the greatest comic drama since—in Congreve, Sheridan, not to mention Molière—has, like butt-and-wit-in-one or self-conscious villainy, been dropped by the modern spirit as a strange, ill-fitting garment, and, since Robertson and Gilbert, has been relegated to frank satire and farce.

How petty and personal Falstaff's philosophy is on the face of it! Bulthaupt, Gervinus, Ulrici, Rötcher, and others after them speak of him sapping the foundations of morality, and Bulthaupt compares him "picking the notion of honor to pieces" with Trast in Sudermann's *Ehre!* There indeed, or in *Arms and the Man*, or in *Major Barbara*, honor reels and totters; but here it comes "unsought for," "pricks" our captain on, and drives him to hide from before its face. By word and by deed he shows that he is not more indifferent to a soldier's honor than is Sganarelle to a husband's, and like him he snatches it greedily when he can. It is the "grin" that he "likes not," and since the beginning of things no philosophy has been needed for that.

For Falstaff is simple as the dramatist and his times. By him the chivalric ideal is never questioned; Hotspur is comical only for his testiness, not for the extravagance and fanaticism of his derring-do. To some critics Falstaff seems a parody or burlesque of knight-hood, and they are reminded of the contemporary Quixote and his Squire. But the only parallel or contrast¹ between knight and

¹ The parallels discovered by Ulrici (Book VI, chap. 7), such as the robbery as a withering travesty of the Hotspur rebellion, or the whole Falstaff episode as intended to parody the hollow pathos of the political history and to assist in scattering the vain deceptive halo with which it has been surrounded, are further symptoms of the craving for unity from which all impressionistic and philosophical critics suffer.

clown suggested is on the battlefield, and there as in Calderon's comedies the ridicule is directed at the clown alone. In the story of Cervantes himself it is so; the chivalric ideal stands unchallenged, though the romantic and sentimental extravagances are scattered like the rear of darkness thin. Even by these Shakespeare is untroubled, and true to the spirit of the Renaissance all his heroes cherish their fame and worship glory. To him as to Molière and Cervantes himself Moron's confession that he had rather live two days in the world than a thousand years in history,¹ would, even in less compromising circumstances, have seemed but clownish and craven, though to us it would seem neither, in our mystical adoration of life and indifference to fame. "Give me life!"—we sadly mistake the ascetic, stoical, chivalric principles, coming down from the earliest times through the Renaissance even to our own, if we fancy that in England or in Italy² there were many who could keep a good conscience and say it. Romeo, Hamlet, Brutus, Othello and Desdemona, Antony and his queen, are, like the ancients, far from saying it, though only happiness, not honor, is at stake. The men of the Renaissance loved life because they had found it sweet, but—especially the Elizabethans—they had not learned to think much better of it than the world had thought before. They loved it as well as we, but not, like us, from principle and as a tenet of their faith.

As incapable as is Shakespeare (in the person of his heroes) of swerving from the conventional standard of honor himself, so incapable is he of comprehending those who swerve. For his clowns the standard is set as for his villains. Sometimes, indeed, though only as rebels, the villains set up a standard of their own, as when Iago asserts the supremacy of his will, calls virtue a fig and reputation an idle and most false imposition.³ But Falstaff is neither rebel nor critic. As clown he is supposed to have neither philosophy nor anti-philosophy, being a comic contrast and appendage to the heroes and the heroic point of view. His cavilings at honor are made

¹ *Princesse d'Élide*, I, ii.

² Bruno would have come nearest to it. Men like Aretino, as in his letter to Strozzi, in 1537, say it cynically. When moved, all Elizabethans, at least in plays, think of death, and so do the Italians of the Renaissance. This subject I hope later to develop more fully.

³ *Othello*, I, iii, 321–38; II, iii, 266–70.

utterly nugatory and frivolous, and his jokes are but telltale wards and feints. Like all stage cowards from Colin to Acres he fulfils the requirements of Mr. Bradley's definition, "feeling a painful fear in the presence of danger and yielding to that fear in spite of his better feelings and convictions." There indeed lies the old-time humor of our knight on the battlefield—quaking and joking as honor pricks him on! As in his fits of remorse or in his incomprehensible lies, he is not merry but "an object of mirth." He is funny not because he feigns and really is "free," but because at uncomfortable moments he pulls so hard on the bit. On his deathbed, I suppose, he was not feigning, and no enfranchised "Ephesian" would there have cried out of sack,¹ of women—or the Whore of Babylon, as Quickly's loyalty and piety would have it.

In that last glimpse is none of the subtlety or indulgence of today. According to Mackenzie, the Man of Feeling, his cowardice is "less a weakness than a principle." He lives as he thinks, as how few of us do! He renounces the "grinning idol," thinks Sir Walter Raleigh, and "runs away or counterfeits death with more courage than others show in deeds of knightly daring." How a saying like that makes the world whirl round us again in the familiar Ptolemaic fashion!² Such transcendental paradox on the one hand, such indulgence to temperament and principle on the other, were unknown to the Sage of Stratford and his time. As I have shown in connection with Shylock³ and the villains, if so Falstaff should think, the worse for him! But the fact is, as we have seen, that Shakespeare has Falstaff at heart think like everyone else, and calls a spade a spade. For him and his fellows a coward is such regardless of distinctions between character and conduct, constitution and principle, and might as well at once have done with them and stick the rabbit scut in his hat. In the comedies of Morgann's own day, as in the mediæval farces, all extenuating distinctions were without a difference. "Look 'ee, Sir Lucius," cries Bob Acres, like another Colin or Jodellet; "'t isn't that I mind the word coward—coward may be said in

¹ Giuseppe Barone (*Un Antenato di Falstaff*) mistakes the expression, and has him cry out *for* sack and women. Just so he would have been presented today: living or dying, our funny men are not troubled with compunctions.

² The great merit of Sir Walter Raleigh's book is that as a whole it does not do this.

³ In *Shylock*, pp. 270–71.

joke. But if you had called me a poltroon, odds daggers and balls!" And when in mellow times Mr. Shaw in *Candida* attempted to establish a difference, and to represent, not one cowardly in principle and courageous by constitution, but one courageous in principle and cowardly by constitution—a compound less dubious and mistakable—what a deal of exposition and manipulation was required!

Subtilized and also sentimentalized! Mr. Bradley does not mind saying that he for one is glad that Falstaff ran away on Gadshill; M. Stapfer declares that morally he was no worse than you or I; and Hazlitt, lost in sympathy with Falstaff in the blighting of his hopes at the succession, resentfully asserts that he was a better man than the Prince. That is, the character is lifted bodily out of the dramatist's reach. Falstaff is a rogue, and people cannot like him: twice Morgann protests that in order to be comical at all he must be "void of evil motive." Lying for profit and jesting for profit, the cheating and swindling of your unsophisticated admirers, gluttony, lechery, extortion, highway robbery, and cowardice—pray, what is funny about all these? Hence the profit has been turned to jest, the misdemeanors to make-believe. Not otherwise Hercules in the *Alcestis* was thought by Browning to get roaring drunk, not for his own private satisfaction but for that of the mourners¹—and there is another who in the good cause of human happiness does not mind making a fool of himself! So it must be when we take a character to our bosoms out of an old play like a pet out of the jungle—we must extract his sting. This by the critics has been duly done, to Falstaff as to Shylock. Our "white-bearded Satan" has had his claws pared.

For those who have not learned to think historically cannot stomach the picaresque. It matters not to them that nearly all the professional comic characters of Elizabethan drama, as of all drama before it, have a vein of roguery in them—Sir Toby as well as Autolycus, the Clown as well as the Vice; or that in those days high and low were rejoicing in the roguery romances, English, French, or Spanish. Yet these people delighted in Falstaff as unreservedly as does the Prince in the play. That they did not take him for an innocuous mimic and merryman numerous allusions in the seventeenth century, as we have already seen, attest. And Hal loved

¹ See Jebb's comment, article "Euripides," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

him as Morgante loved Margutte, as Baldus loved Cingar, and Pantagruel—"all his life long"—loved Panurge, not for his humor only but for his lies and deviltry. They had their notions of "a character" as we have ours. With endless variety of repetition Rabelais revels in notions of drunkenness, gluttony, lasciviousness, and in tricks of cheating and cruelty, as things funny in themselves. With what gusto he tells of the outrages perpetrated by Panurge on the watch, the difficult Parisian lady, and Dingdong and his flock, and of Friar John's slaying and curiously and expertly mutilating his thousands with the staff of the cross in the abbey close! And yet, frowning down the facts, the critics declare that Falstaff had no malice in him,¹ and though he laments the repayment had no intention of keeping the stolen money, repaid Quickly full measure and running over with his company, and after all did no mentionable injury to Shallow, who had land and beeves. "Where does he cheat the weak," cries Maginn, "or prey upon the poor?" There is Quickly, poor, and weak at least before his blandishments, "made to serve his uses both in purse and in person"; and there are Bullcalf, who has a desire to stay with his friends, and Mouldy, whose dame is old and cannot help herself, both swindled in the name of the King, as Wart, Feeble, and Shadow, the unlikeliest men, are wrongfully pressed into service. All this once was funny, and now is base and pitiful,² but why should we either shut our eyes to it or bewail it? Surely we cannot with Morgann make allowances for his age and corpulency (how that would have staggered an Elizabethan!) and corrupting associations; or with Maginn trace the pathos of his degradation, hope after hope breaking down; or with Swinburne discover the well of tenderness within him, his heart being "fracted and corroborate," not for material disappointment, but for wounded love.³ With this last the present Chief Secretary

¹ Raleigh, p. 189; Wolff, I, p. 423; cf. Part II, III, ii, 353-57; IV, iii, 137-42.

² The scenes (Part I, III, iii; Part II, II, i) where Falstaff, upbraided by Quickly, retorts in chirk and clever vein, resemble the scene in *Le Medecin malgré lui* where Sganarelle does the same to his long-suffering wife. And the scene where the latter imposes on the country bumpkins with fraudulent remedies resembles that in which Falstaff and Bardolph fleece the conscripts.

³ If Shakespeare means that he really is heartbroken (which Mr. Birrell denies) it is not the first or the last time that the dramatist permits himself a bit of sentiment upon the death of the unworthy.

for Ireland is properly disgusted, though in being less sentimental he is hardly more Elizabethan in spirit as he calls him "in a very real sense a terrible character, so old and so profane!"¹ Yet Mr. Birrell remembers him (where others have been glad to forget him) with Doll at the Boar's Head, and he reads an unexpurgated text. And if he does not look with the eyes of an Elizabethan, he looks with his own, and sees the old rogue and satyr in his heathen nakedness, not in the breeches that, like Volterra in the Sistine, the critics have hastened to make him.

Morals and sentiments alike, in the lapse of time, obliterate humor. Laughter is essentially a *geste social*, as Meredith and Professor Bergson have truly told us; and the immediate and necessary inference, which no doubt they themselves would have drawn, is that it languishes when the tickled *mores* change. Much that was funny to the Elizabethans or to the court of the Grand Monarch has since become pathetic, as in Shylock and Harpagon, Alceste and Georges Dandin, and "disgusting" or even "terrible," as in Falstaff or Tartuffe. Of this we have just seen repeated instances, and of the process of critical emasculation which in consequence ensues. Even the form and fashion of the older humor has given offense. Most of the English critics apparently have not seen Falstaff on the stage, but those who have cannot recall him there without a shudder. The roaring, the falling flat, and above all the padding—"a very little stuffing," one of them pleads, "would answer all the requirements of the part."² And the padded bulk of his humor, as of his person—"out of all measure, out of all compass"—about his name being terrible to the enemy and known to all Europe, and Turk Gregory never doing such deeds, is so reduced by anachronizing Procrustean critics as to contain "nothing but a light ridicule."³ His ancestral ring seems to have been really of gold, not copper, "though probably a little too much

¹ *Renaissance Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part II*, pp. xvi, xviii. Cf. p. xv: "Falstaff's words 'Kiss me, Doll,' followed by his cry, 'I am old, I am old,' together with other touches in the same scene, might well stand for the last words of disgust and horror." They were meant, certainly, to be funny. Funniest of all, no doubt, was the worst, at the end of the scene, where Bardolph, from within, cries, "Bid Mistress Tearsheet come to my master," and motherly Mistress Quickly bids her run.

² *Fraser's*, xlvi: p. 409; Morgann, p. 26, etc.

³ Morgann, pp. 41, 83; Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, p. 267—"must not be entirely ignored."

alloyed with baser metal."¹ And his "old ward," like his "manhood," Hal might have remembered if he would.² What of the multitudinous knaves in buckram and Kendal green, or of the knight himself at Hal's age not an eagle's talon in the waist or an alderman's thumb-ring, or of the nine score and odd posts he foundered as he devoured the road to battle in Gaultree Forest? Even his laugh, which must have been big as his body, riotous as his fancy, lingering and reverberating as the repetitions of his tongue,³ has been taken away.⁴ "The wit is from the head, not the heart. It is anything but fun." If we are to depend on stage directions there is no laughter in Sir Toby either, or almost any other jovial soul in Shakespeare. In robbing these fat knights of their fun critical treason has well-nigh done its worst, though before that it robbed audiences (at the cost of truth though to the profit of morals) of the fun got from Shylock, Harpagon, Dandin, and Tartuffe. On the stage and in the study much of the comedy in Shakespeare and Molière has been smothered out of them from the Romantic Revival⁵ unto this day, and yet we smile at the Middle Ages Christianizing the classics.

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¹ Morgann, p. 54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³ This rolling of his jest as a sweet morsel between his lips is one of his most striking traits: as "food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better. Tush, man, mortal men, mortal men!" Cf. "I am old, I am old"; and the manifold repetitions in Part I, II, iv.

⁴ Maginn, p. 56: "he never laughs."

⁵ This is a subject to which I hope to return.